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Dick York

Richard Allen York (September 4, 1928 – February 20, 1992) was an American radio, stage, film, and television actor. He was the first actor to play Darrin Stephens on the ABC fantasy sitcom *Bewitched*. He played teacher Bertram Cates in the film *Inherit the Wind* (1960).

York's career was hampered by a serious back injury he sustained while working on the film *They Came to Cordura* in 1959; although his role in *Bewitched* was a success, he left the series in 1969 after a further decline in his physical health, and rarely acted thereafter.

Dick York

Dick York in 1965

Born	Richard Allen York September 4, 1928 Fort Wayne, Indiana, U.S.
Died	February 20, 1992 (aged 63) East Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.
Resting place	Plainfield Cemetery in Rockford, Michigan, U.S.
Occupation	Actor
Years active	1943–1970, 1972–1984
Spouse	Joan Alt (m. 1951)
Children	5

Early life

York was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana to Bernard York, a salesman, and Betty, a seamstress.[1][2] He grew up in Chicago, where a Catholic nun first recognized his vocal promise.[3] He began his career at the age of 15 as the star of the CBS radio program *That Brewster Boy*. He also appeared in hundreds of other radio shows and instructional films before heading to New York City, where he acted on Broadway in *Tea and Sympathy* and *Bus Stop*.[4] He performed with stars including Paul Muni and Joanne Woodward in live television broadcasts and with Janet Leigh, Jack Lemmon, and Glenn Ford in movies, including *My Sister Eileen* and *Cowboy*.

While filming the movie *They Came to Cordura* (1959) with Gary Cooper and Rita Hayworth, he suffered a permanent, disabling back injury. In York's own words, "Gary Cooper and I were propelling a handcar carrying several 'wounded' men down [the] railroad track. I was on the bottom stroke of this sort of teeter-totter mechanism that made the handcar run. I was just lifting the handle up as the director yelled 'cut!' and one of the 'wounded' cast members reached up and grabbed the handle. Now, instead of lifting the expected weight, I was suddenly, jarringly, lifting his entire weight off the flatbed – 180 pounds or so. The muscles along the right side of my back tore. They just snapped and let loose. And that was the start of it all: the pain, the painkillers, the addiction, the lost career."[5]

York's injury did not immediately end his career. In 1960, a year after York's injury, he played Bertram Cates (modeled on John Thomas Scopes, of "Monkey Trial" fame) in the film version of *Inherit the Wind*.[6]

York went on to star with Gene Kelly and Leo G. Carroll in the ABC comedy-drama *Going My Way* (1962). York was cast in the series, which lasted one season, as Tom Colwell, who operates a secular youth center.

York appeared in dozens of episodes of now-classic television series, including *Justice*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, *The Untouchables*, *Rawhide*, *The Americans*, *Wagon Train*, *Father Knows Best*, and CBS's *The Twilight Zone* and *Route 66*.

Bewitched

York was cast as Darrin Stephens in the 1960s sitcom *Bewitched* as Samantha's (Elizabeth Montgomery) mortal husband. The show was a huge success and York was nominated for an Emmy Award in 1968.[2]

York with *Bewitched* co-stars Elizabeth Montgomery as Samantha Stephens (front) and Agnes Moorehead as Endora (back)

The crew built York a slanted wall on which he could lean between scenes; during the first two seasons, this allowed York to manage his back injury with little difficulty. Halfway through the third season, York's back injury was aggravated into a painful degenerative spine condition, frequently causing shooting delays while he required assistance to walk. Because York would sometimes be seized with debilitating pain, the scripts for some of his later *Bewitched* episodes were written and staged such that his character would be in bed or on the couch for the entire episode. York did not appear in several third- and fourth-season episodes, and his eventual departure from the show well into the filming of the fifth season necessitated more episodes focusing on Samantha and other members of her family, with mentions that Darrin was away on business.

While filming the fifth-season episode "Daddy Does His Thing", York fell ill: "I was too sick to go on. I had a temperature of 105, full of strong antibiotics, for almost 10 days. I went to work that day, but I was sick. I lay in my dressing room after being in make-up, waiting to be called on the set. They knew I was feeling pretty rotten, and they tried to give me time to rest. I kept having chills. This was the middle of the summer and I was wearing a sheepskin jacket and I was chilling. I was shaking all over. Then, while sitting on a scaffolding with Maurice Evans, being lit for a special-effects scene: They were setting an inky – that's a little tiny [spotlight] that was supposed to be just flickering over my eyes. That flickering, flickering, flickering made me feel weird. And I'm sitting on this platform up in the air... and I turned to Gibby, who was just down below, and I said, 'Gibby, I think I have to get down.' He started to help me down and that's the last thing I remember until I woke up on the floor. That's about all I remember of the incident... and I'd managed to bite a very large hole in the side of my tongue before they could pry my teeth apart."[5]

From York's hospital bed, he and director William Asher discussed York's future. "Do you want to quit?" Asher asked. "If it's all right with you, Billy," York replied. With that, York left the sitcom to devote himself to recovery, never to return. Dick Sargent replaced York in the role of Darrin Stephens, taking over the role

at the start of the series' sixth season (1969–1970) and continuing in the part until the series ended after its eighth season (1971–1972). Sargent was originally offered the role of Darrin in 1964, but declined in favor of a part in the short-lived sitcom *Broadside*.[7]

Later years

For the next 18 months, York was largely bed-ridden in a haze of prescription painkillers.[3] In his memoir, *The Seesaw Girl and Me*, published posthumously, he describes the struggle to break his addiction and come to grips with the loss of his career. The book is in large part a love letter to his wife, Joan (née Alt), the seesaw girl of the title, who stuck with him through the hard times.

He then quit drugs cold turkey, which led to six months' difficult withdrawal and recovery. "I had a band playing in my head, bagpipes night and day," York recalled. "It just went on and on and on and on and on... The fans whisper to you and the walls whisper to you and you look at television and sometimes it flashes in a certain way that sends you into a fit and you know that your wife has put her hand in your mouth so you won't bite off your tongue. You can't sleep. You hallucinate. I used to make a tape recording of rain so I could listen to the rain lying in bed at night to drown out those damned bagpipes."[3]

York eventually beat his addiction, and in the early 1980s tried to revive his career. His last two credits were on two primetime television series, *Simon & Simon* and *Fantasy Island*. Afterward he stopped receiving calls when his agent failed to register with the Screen Actors Guild on his behalf, and he retired from show business.[5]

Death

York was a three-pack-a-day smoker for much of his life and often smoked cigarettes on the set of *Bewitched*; he spent his final years battling emphysema.[2] By 1989, he was using an oxygen tank to help him breathe.[3] While bedridden in his Rockford, Michigan, home, he founded *Acting for Life*, a private charity to help the homeless and others in need. Using his telephone as his pulpit, York motivated politicians, business people, and the general public to contribute supplies and money.[3]

Despite his suffering, York said, "I've been blessed. I have no complaints. I've been surrounded by people in radio, on stage, and in motion pictures and television who love me. The things that have gone wrong have been simply physical things."[5]

York died of complications from emphysema at Blodgett Hospital in East Grand Rapids, Michigan, on February 20, 1992, at age 63. He is buried at Plainfield Cemetery in Rockford, Michigan.[8]

Filmography

Film			
Year	**Title**	**Role**	**Notes**
1945	*Insomnia (https://archive.org/details/CombatFa1945)* (*Combat Fatigue: Insomnia*)	Lucky	Uncredited, Short film for U.S. Navy
1947	*Shy Guy*	Philip Norton	Short
1949	*Rest and Health*	George	Short
1950	*Last Date*	Nick	Short, driver's education film. Credited as Richard York
1951	*How Friendly Are You?*	Phil	Short
1955	*My Sister Eileen*	Ted 'Wreck' Loomis	
1955	*Three Stripes in the Sun*	Corporal Neeby Muhlendorf	
1957	*Operation Mad Ball*	Corporal Bohun	
1958	*Cowboy*	Charlie, Trailhand	
1959	*The Last Blitzkrieg*	Sgt. Ludwig	
1959	*They Came to Cordura*	Private Renziehausen	
1960	*Inherit the Wind*	Bertram T. Cates	
Television			
Year	**Title**	**Role**	**Notes**
1953	*Omnibus*	Nick	Episode: "The Battler"
1955	*Goodyear Television Playhouse*	John Randolph	Episode: "Visit to a Small Planet"
1955	*The Philco Television Playhouse*	Andy	Episode: "Incident in July"
1955	*Justice*		Episode: "Fatal Payment"
1955–1957	*Kraft Television Theatre*		Episode: "Million Dollar Rookie Episode: "Mock Trial" Episode: "Ride into Danger"
1956	*Playwrights '56*	Grayson	Episode: "Honor"
1956	*Eye on New York*	Lt. Mac Hartman	Episode: "Night of the Auk"
1956–1958	*Studio One*	George Fox George Weston Captain Jay Hellman	Episode: "A Man's World" Episode: "The Weston Strain" Episode: "The Enemy Within"
1958	*Father Knows Best*	Tom Wentworth	Episode: "Betty, The Pioneer Woman"
1957	*The Kaiser Aluminum Hour*	Edward Gillis	Episode: "A Real Fine Cutting Edge"
1957–1963	*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*	Manny Coe Norman Logan J.J. Bunce Ralph Jones	Episode: "Vicious Circle" Episode: "The Dusty Drawer" Episode: "The Blessington Method" Episode: "The Doubtful Doctor"

		Tom Barton Herbert J. Wiggam	Episode: "You Can't Be a Little Girl All Your Life" Episode: "The Twelve Hour Caper"
1958	*The United States Steel Hour*	Gordon Bates	Episode: "Beaver Patrol"
	Climax!	Gordon Bates	Episode: "Shooting for the Moon"
1958–1959	*Playhouse 90*	Scott Arlen Tom Matthew Sherwood	Episode: "The Last Clear Chance" Episode: "The Time of Your Life" Episode: "Made in Japan" Episode: "Out of Dust"
1958, 1960	*The Millionaire*	Ken Leighton Sandy Newell	Episode: "The Ken Leighton Story" Episode: "Millionaire Sandy Newell"
1960	*The Untouchables*	Ernie Torrance	Episode: "The White Slavers"
	Alcoa Theatre	Corporal James Sloan	Episode: "The Glorious Fourth"
	Stagecoach West	Webb Crawford	Episode: "Three Wise Men"
1960–1961	*The Twilight Zone*	Captain Phil Riker Hector Poole	Episode: "The Purple Testament" Episode: "A Penny for Your Thoughts"
1961	*Naked City*	Charles Colano	Episode: "Bullets Cost Too Much"
	The DuPont Show with June Allyson	Lt. James Whitney	Episode: "School of the Soldier"
	The Americans	Bolick	Episode: "The War Between the States"
	General Electric Theater	Ashael Miller	Episode: "A Musket for Jessica"
	Adventures in Paradise	Markham Jones	Episode: "The Reluctant Hero"
	The Outlaws	Sam Nichols	Episode: "Night Riders"
	Dr. Kildare	Harry Benton	Episode: "The Lonely Ones"
	Frontier Circus	Jeb Randall	Episode: "The Shaggy Kings"
1961, 1963	*Rawhide*	Frank Price Elwood P. Gilroy	Episode: "Incident of the Broken Word" Episode: "Incident at Confidence Creek"
1961–1964	*Wagon Train*	Willie Pettigrew Charley Shutup Ben Mitchell	Episode: "The Clementine Jones Story" Episode: "The Charley Shutup Story" Episode: "The Michael Malone Story"
1962	*Thriller*	Fred Bancroft	Episode: "The Incredible Doktor Markesan"
1962–1963	*Going My Way*	Tom Colwell	
1963	*Insight*		Episode: "Breakthrough"
	Route 66	Lieutenant School	Episode: "What a Shining Young Man Was Our Gallant Lieutenant"
	The Alfred Hitchcock Hour	Sheriff Will Pearce	Episode: "Terror at Northfield"
	The Virginian	Jeff Tolliver	Episode: "Stopover in a Western Town"
1964–1969	*Bewitched*	Darrin Stephens	Main role; 5 seasons
1965	*The Flintstones*	Darrin Stephens	Episode: "Samantha"
1983	*Simon & Simon*	Martin Donlevy	Episode: "Too Much of a Good Thing"

1984	*Fantasy Island*	Mr. Sutton	Episode: "Sweet Life/Games People Play"
2005	*Bewitched*	Darrin Stephens	Uncredited, Archive footage

Awards and nominations

Emmy Awards

- 1968: Nominated, "Outstanding Continued Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Comedy Series"- *Bewitched*

See also

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External links

- Dick York (https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0948685/) at IMDb
- Dick York (https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/65868) at the Internet Broadway Database
- Dick York (https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/person/211024%7C*) at the TCM Movie Database

- Dick York (https://www.allmovie.com/artist/p78060) at AllMovie

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